

**COMMUNICATION FOR
SOCIAL CHANGE**
ANTHOLOGY:
HISTORICAL AND
CONTEMPORARY
READINGS

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PP-AI-171

Published by Communication for Social Change Consortium, Inc.

PUBLISHER Denise Gray-Felder

PRODUCTION EDITOR: Susan Mach

COPY EDITORS: Denise Gray-Felder, Laurence Mach, Susan Mach

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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ISBN: 0-9770357-9-4

A FAREWELL TO ARISTOTLE: 'HORIZONTAL' COMMUNICATION

By Luis Ramiro Beltrán

1979 That which is utopian
is not that which is unattainable;
it is not idealism;

it is a dialectic process of
denouncing and announcing;
denouncing the dehumanizing structure
and announcing the humanizing structure.

—Paulo Freire

International communication used to be, for the most part, a territory of quiet waters. Not any more. In the present decade it has become a center of major, and often heated, controversy as a part of a broader and increasing confrontation between developed and developing countries. Militant discomfort between them existed already. ...What is rather a new event is the full realization that the situation of dependence is also true in the cultural sphere—and the acknowledgement—[in] this decade—that communication does much in the service of all three types of neocolonial domination.¹

Third World countries are not only struggling today to bring about a real end to colonialism by obtaining fair treatment in trade and aid. They are simultaneously and relatedly pursuing the establishment of a “*New International Economic Order*”² and a “*New International Information Order*.” As both these attempts are being actively resisted by most developed countries, communication has now come to lie neatly in the domain of international conflict.

Manifestations of the conflict occur at different levels and in many places, mostly through public discussion, which, since the middle of the decade, often reaches combusive characteristics. One illustration

was an intergovernmental conference on national communication policies in Latin America held under UNESCO's sponsorship in Costa Rica in 1976. This meeting included recommendations to achieve balance in the international flow of information and to endow the region with an independent news agency capable of at least alleviating the consequences of the quasi-monopoly exercised by UPI and AP. From inception to conclusions, the meeting was the object of a concerted and virulent attack by international communication organizations that regarded it as a threat to freedom of information.³ Another illustration of the conflict is the recent approval by UNESCO's General Conference of a declaration on international communication.⁴ This compromise statement is the final product of a years-long fierce and noisy battle between those considering it an expression of intent of totalitarian control of communication and those perceiving it, on the contrary, as an expression of the will for genuinely democratizing it.

...The conflict embraces several major areas of concern. Political leaders, development strategists, researchers, and communication practitioners in developing countries are on the one hand questioning the structure, operations, financing, ideology, and influence of certain mighty international communication organizations. On the other hand, they are challenging many of the traditional concepts of communication born in developed countries and not too long ago accepted also in the rest of the world.

In the former area the role of international news agencies, TV and film exporters, and transnational advertisers is being condemned as a key tool for external domination. In the latter area, the classical concepts of press freedom, communication rights, and free flow of information, as well as the standard definition of news itself, are also rated instrumental for domination. Even the alien influences on the orientation and conduct of research⁵ and training in communication are subject to critical assessment.

Finally, the very conceptualization of the nature of communication, as coming from developed countries, is today being contested in developing ones.

...Attempts at defining communication can be traced back to Aristotle, who saw rhetoric as composed of three elements: *the speaker, the speech, and the listener* and perceived the aim of it as “the search for all possible means of persuasion.” Centuries later, and with many more minds working on the matter, this classical definition seems ...the root of almost all prevailing conceptualizations.

Lasswell: Communicators after Effects

Indeed, the most widely accepted definition of our age is that of Lasswell,⁶ who essentially advanced Aristotle’s proposition by adding two elements to it. Whereas Aristotle had identified the *who, what, and to whom* of communication, Lasswell refined the scheme by stipulating the *how* and making explicit the *what for* as follows:

A convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions:

- Who
- Says What
- In Which Channel
- To Whom
- With What Effect?

Lasswell saw communication as performing three functions: *surveillance* of the environment, *correlation* of the components of society, and cultural *transmission* between generations. In doing so, according to De Fleur,⁷ Lasswell was attempting to temper the mechanistic influence of the classical stimulus-response theory. He was taking into account contextual or situational variables stressed as intervening between “S” and “R” by the social categories and individual differences theories. His basic paradigm generated prompt and widespread following. His attention to some sociostructural considerations did not.

Transmission and Influence

From Lasswell on, the notion of *transfer* was to characterize many derived conceptualizations of communication. Such was the case, for instance, of an also extensively used definition provided by Berelson and Steiner.⁸

The transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc. by use of symbols-words, pictures, figures, graphs, etc. It is the act or process of transmission that is usually called communication.

Similarly, the notion of influence (through persuasion) as the central goal of communication was to be included in several subsequent definitions, such as this one by Osgood.⁹

In the most general sense, we have communication whenever one system, a source, influences another, the destination, by manipulation of alternative signals which can be transferred over the channel connecting them.

Also staying with Lasswell’s paradigm, Nixon¹⁰ stressed two ingredients of the process: *the intentions of the communicator and the conditions under which the message is received.*

From Electronics: Sources and Receivers

Then, engineers Shannon and Weaver¹¹ came up with a mathematical theory of communication, the presentation of which they made with the following statement:

The word communication will be used here in a very broad sense to include all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another.

Shannon and Weaver¹² conceive of a general communication system as composed of five essential parts (plus “noise”):

1. An *information source* which produces a message or sequence of messages to be communicated to the receiving terminal...
2. A *transmitter* which operates on the message in some way to produce a signal suitable of transmission over the channel...

3. The *channel* is merely the medium used to transmit the signal from transmitter to receiver...
4. The *receiver* ordinarily performs the inverse operation of that done by the transmitter, reconstructing the message from the signal...
5. The *destination* is the person (or thing) for whom the message is intended.

Schramm¹³ adapted this model, essentially constructed to describe electromechanic communication, to human communication, emphasizing the signal (message) encoding-decoding functions of the mind. Defining communication as *the sharing of information, ideas, or attitudes* and stressing with different terms the Aristotelian principle that communication always requires at least three elements: *source, message, and destination*, he played up in the scheme the *encoder* and *decoder* components, noted Schramm.¹⁴ Substitute “microphone” for encoder, and “earphone” for decoder and you are talking about electronic communication. Consider that the source and encoder are one person, decoder and destination are another, and the signal is language, and you are talking about human communication.

Berlo¹⁵ significantly contributed also to the analysis of encoding-decoding operations in human communication, suggesting the convenience of distinguishing source from encoder and decoder from receiver. Furthermore, Berlo advocated perceiving communication as a process.¹⁶

If we accept the concept of process, we view the events and relationships as dynamic, ongoing, ever-changing, continuous ... The ingredients within a process interact; each affects all of the others. ... Communication theory reflects a process point of view. ...

From Cybernetics: Feedback for Control

Cybernetics added one more factor to the description of the process: *feedback*. It refers to control mechanisms enabling organisms to adjust automatically to behavioural goals. These are essentially communication

mechanisms. In fact, as Wiener¹⁷ understands cybernetics, “It is the study of messages, and in particular of effective message control. ...”

Although these concepts were intended to apply basically to the engineering and physiological domains, several theoreticians of human communication accepted them as useful also to describe the process of this latter. For, if sources were to attain, through their messages, the effects they intended over the receivers, they had to get back, from these latter, reactive clues as to the effectiveness of their persuasive attempts and, accordingly, adjust their messages to those goals. One example of such assimilation is found in the model proposed by Westley and McLean.¹⁸

The Endurable Scheme: S-M-C-R

Finally, the human or social communication model derived from the concatenated conceptualizations reviewed here came to include the following elements as fundamental: *Source—Encoder—Message—Channel—Decoder—Receiver—Effect*. And its paramount purpose – *persuasion* – was stressed: “When people control one another, they do so primarily through communication.”¹⁹

The basic definitions and general schemes so far inventoried in this paper permeated the scientific literature pertinent to communication, reproducing their key elements in several more specialized definitions. For instance, Hovland²⁰ understood *interpersonal communication* as an interacting situation in which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal symbols) to modify the behaviour of other individuals in a face-to-face setting. Comparably, *mass communication* has been perceived as follows: “Every mass-communicated act can be broken down into five elements: *communicators* who transmit a given *message* through a *channel* to an *audience* with some kind of *effect*.”²¹ Likewise, *nonverbal communication* was defined as “the transfer of meaning, involving the absence of symbolic sound representations.”²²

In summary, the traditional definition of communication is one depicting it as the act or process of transmission of messages from sources to receivers through the exchange of symbols (pertaining to codes shared by them) by means of signal-carrying channels. In this classical paradigm, the chief aim of communication is the communicator's intent to affect in given directions the behaviour of the communicatees...

Early Criticisms of Traditional Conceptualizations

Definitions are the product of reflections about experience and, in turn, at least to some extent, they orient practice. Basically, the traditional conceptualization of communication and the classical paradigm of it were the result of experience with communication in the United States of America and Western Europe. The model then reflected back on the subsequent practice of communication (production, teaching, research, etc.) and not only in those countries but most everywhere else in the world. Its impact proved particularly strong on communication training and research, activities started some 40 years ago.

No Transmission and No Act

...Nevertheless, the pattern did not remain unchallenged for too long, although its influence was to show strength and penetration so remarkable that it survives to this day. From different standpoints a few precursors began questioning some aspects of the traditional model. Toch and MacLean were among them, but a scholar who articulated and propagated a major early criticism was David K. Berlo, chairman of the Department of Communication at Michigan State University. Berlo²³ argued against what he labelled the "bucket" theory of communication as follows:

This viewpoint assumes that meanings are to be found in words or other symbols and that communication consists of the transmission of ideas from one individual to another through the use of symbols. This can be characterized as a process of dumping ideas from the source into a bucket—such as a film, a lecture, a book, a television

program or what-have-you and shipping the bucket over to the receiver and dumping the contents into his head ... The communication position is that meanings are not contained in the symbols used but are found in the people who produce and receive those symbols. There are no right meanings for a symbol. There only are whatever meanings people have. Correspondingly, communication is not viewed as the transmission of ideas or information through the use of a message-media vehicle. Rather it is considered as the selection and transmission of symbols *which have a probability of eliciting the intended meaning from the receiver* [emphasis added].

Two basic assumptions of the traditional conceptualization were being questioned here. On the one hand, the mechanical notion of knowledge transfer from one mind to another by means of signals transported by channels was being replaced by one arguing that symbols were only stimuli exerted by the source on the receiver with the expectation that they would make the latter retrieve from his experience the meanings involved and thus, probably, obtain from him the behavioral responses intended. In a certain sense, this implied a non-passive role by the receiver. And thus, on the other hand, the reformulation involved a relationship of interaction rather than one in which the action was only performed by the source/emitter of the stimuli. This, in turn, was rooted in the perception of communication as a process that Berlo had proposed. Moreover, with communication being perceived as interactive and a process, the concept of feedback had to gain in relevance. Its bidirectionality was now played up conceptually. Later, some of the most distinguished academic leaders of the profession came to share this acknowledgement, as can be seen in the following statement of Daniel Lerner²⁴:

We have studied communication as a linear operation in which a certain sender uses a certain channel to deliver a message to a receiver (an audience) who then is affected in some way by that message ... Today, even sober professionals like

ourselves recognize that two-way interaction and feedback are essential concepts in our thinking about communication and its future.

Referring to the traditional models of communication, Wilbur Schramm²⁵ himself admitted: “They all were built upon the idea of something being transferred from a sender to a receiver. I am going to ask whether this is any longer the most fruitful way to look at communication.” And, in assessing models somewhat more socially oriented, he added: “Their essential element is not something passing from sender to receiver, like a baseball from pitcher to catcher (perhaps with a batter between them to represent noise) but rather a *relationship*.”

The partial amendment of the transmission concept, as well as its interaction-process corollary, were evidently not resisted at the conceptual level. In fact, several scholars sincerely shared them as is seen, for instance, in Gerbner’s²⁶ definition of communication as social interaction through the exchange of messages involving cultural sharing. Models developed by Newcomb, Westley and MacLean,²⁷ and Schramm²⁸ emphasized the audience as an active component of the process, so active, in fact, that was now called “obstinate.”²⁹

Practice Betrays Theory

At the operational level, however, the established concepts had—and still have—but negligible application to every-day practice. For the most part, communication training appears still based today on the notion of transmission. And in the research activity, many—such as, Brooks and Scheidel,³⁰ Smith,³¹ and Arundale³²—have noted that the majority of studies are in fact still conducted taking communication as a static phenomenon while the academic community verbally professes adherence to the notion of process. Bauer,²⁹ on the other hand, demonstrated how communication research was limited by the transmission paradigm. And Kumata³³ explained that adherence to old concepts and methods had produced

unidimensional communication research unable to cope with complex and dynamic social realities.

Similarly, although professional discourse does acknowledge widely the two-way nature of communication, the practice of it still conforms predominantly to the unilinear S-M-C-R traditional paradigm.

Katz and Lazarsfeld³⁴ demonstrated that the “hypodermic effect” of the mass media on the isolated individual in the lonely crowd was actually mediated by reference groups and through influentials in a two-step flow fashion. This gave opportunities for paying attention to social interaction considerations.

Nevertheless, “what they described as interaction between the receiver and his social communication network is generally still a one-way model” (Harms and Richstad).³⁵ Indeed, as Coleman³⁶ noted, communication researchers placed exaggerated emphasis on the individual as the unit of analysis, neglecting the *relationship* between sources and receivers. The strong influence of social psychology on communication research provided later another set of opportunities for perceiving communication as affected by the structure containing it. And so did the concomitant research based upon the very popular model of diffusion of innovations. However, on the former, Zires de Janka³⁷ pointed out that “... the basic framework of the scheme was neither altered nor questioned.” And, on the latter, several critics have noted that, in spite of its attention to some sociocultural variables, it failed to grasp the determinant influence that archaic social structures exert on communication (Cuellar and Gutierrez).³⁸ Admitting, these and other shortcomings, Rogers³⁹ strongly advocated for research methodologies tapping *relationships*, such as network analysis.

Research is not the only area of activity where the traditional model exhibits stubborn endurance. The practice of international communication constitutes an eloquent example of how also at the level of nations communication essentially occurs in a unilinear direction from the developed countries to the

underdeveloped ones. As has been extensively verified, U. S. transnational news agencies and advertising firms control the great majority of the respective businesses almost all over the world. And what was for years proclaimed as “the free flow of information” has been found by research to be pretty much a one-way flow and not exactly free, especially in view of propaganda uses of news and ads addressed at manipulating public opinion.^{40, 41, 42}

Information: Not Equal to Communication

Another line of criticism focused on the confusion between information and communication resulting also from the traditional schemes. An Argentinian analyst argued about the nature of communication as follows:

Communication is not an act but a process by which an individual enters into mental co-operation with another individual until they come to constitute a common conscience... Information, instead, is just a unilateral translation of a message from an emitter to a receiver... The radiation, from centralized informants, of messages without dialogical return, cannot be identified with the intersubjective co-activity of which communication consists.⁴³

Likewise, a Peruvian scholar, Rafael Roncagliolo⁴⁴ contended that “we are witnessing a reduction in human communication—a concept that implies reciprocity—in favor of information and dissemination; that is, of all the modern forms of imposition by transmitters upon receivers that we erroneously continue to call mass communication.”⁴⁵ European scholars concur:

To communicate refers to a two-way process, which has emotional as well as cognitive elements and which takes place in non-verbal as well as verbal forms. To inform on the other hand refers to a one-way process of predominantly knowledge oriented, verbal communication.

And an analyst of communication rights, Jean D’Arcy⁴⁶ predicts that: “The time will come when the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights will have to encompass a more extensive right than man’s right to information, first laid down (in 1948) in Article 19. This is the right of man to communicate.”

The criticisms so far reviewed in this paper can be summarized in the following manner: (1) Traditional definitions and models are unilinear, wrongly postulating a mechanical notion of communication as the transmission of information from active sources to passive receivers. Actually, there is no transmission; there is only elicitation of meanings which already exist in people and who, in decoding symbols, become actively involved. (2) Those models, moreover, are based on the erroneous notion that communication is an act, a static phenomenon privileging the source; communication is really a process where all elements operate dynamically. Thus it is eminently a case of social relationships, a phenomenon of multiple exchange of experiences, and not a unilateral exercise of individual influence. (3) The models, finally, induce a confusion between information, which can be transferred, by a one-way act, and communication, which is different and broader than information as its two-way nature necessarily involves interaction, seeking commonality of meanings or conscience.

Recent Criticisms: Different Concerns

Most of the criticisms of the traditional definitions and models of communication surfaced within the very society that had generated these latter: the United States of America. Thus, understandably, those criticisms included aspects of interest to that society and excluded others which were not of its concern. One in the latter category has been, most evidently, persuasion. With very few exceptions, objections to persuasion as the central aim of communication were not raised in the United States.⁴⁷ Behavioural manipulation of people through the means of communication appeared to be natural and legitimate in that country. Already in 1957 Merton⁴⁸ had asked: “How can we analyze propaganda, films, radio, and print in such a way that we can determine what is likely to *produce given*

effects?” (Emphasis added.) For many years, many people concentrated on seeking answers:

The all-consuming question that has dominated research and the development of contemporary theory in the study of the mass media can be summed up in simple terms, namely, ‘What has been their effect?’...Persuasion is only one possible “effect” among many, but upon which great attention has been focused. It has been assumed that an effective persuasive message is one which has properties capable of altering the psychological functioning of the individual in such a way that he will respond overtly (toward the item which is the object of persuasion) in modes desired or suggested by the communicator.⁴⁹

On the other hand, when attention was granted to sociocultural variables affecting communication behaviour, this seemed essentially motivated by persuaders having learned that individuals could not be most effectively influenced if taken as detached from their societal context. Basically, the challenge then became how to best use the social environment to help attain audience responses fitting with the purposes of communicators, or how to secure individual compliance with the norms and values of their social structure.

...Evidently, the classical paradigm had steered researchers to concentrate their studies on the persuasibility of the receiver, as an individual and as member of social groupings, so as to be able to help control his behavior. “If from time to time attention has been given to some other aspect of the media, for example, to the nature of the communicator, the structure of media content, or the nature of the audiences, the ultimate purpose was to see how variations in these factors have influenced the kinds of responses that have resulted from exposure to the media.”⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, research on the source was especially neglected.^{51,52}

Persuasion: A Tool for the Status Quo

The classical paradigm also led researchers to focus on mass communication *functions* in society, which had

been expanded beyond Lasswell’s basic propositions by Lazarsfeld and Merton,⁵³ Wright,⁵⁴ and others.

Whereas *the effects orientation* sought to find out what media do to people, the *functions orientation* aimed at finding what media do for people.

It was in Latin America, where objections to both orientations were probably first made. In 1970, Armand Mattelart⁵⁵ argued:

The study of effects indicates the therapeutic and operative nature of this sociology whose aim is to improve the relationship between a given audience and a message-emitting commercial firm. ... The analysis of functions indicates the preoccupation of this sociology with the receiver’s motivation. ... Now, if we look for the common point between these observations, we shall see that neither of the two is conceivable without the researcher implicitly endorsing the extant social system.”

The analyst explained his assessment of functionalism as a pro-status quo orientation by stressing “... the fact that the indicator of a rupture with the system (the dysfunction) is never considered in its prospective or transformational aspect. ... The dysfunction is never explicitly regarded as the fundament for another system.”⁵⁶

Facilitating Mercantilism and Propaganda

The presence of a conservative bias in persuasion operations may not constitute a substantive preoccupation in societies such as the United States of America. But it is a matter of serious concern for societies such as those of Latin America, especially in terms of international communication. Thus, naturally, several Latin Americans shared the early criticisms of the traditional paradigm, such as the one on mechanism. They, however, contended, that acknowledging the fact that communication is a process falls short of divesting the scheme from its authoritarian affiliation.⁵⁷

...Because of a long experience, Latin Americans questioned them as instrumental for mercantilism,

propaganda, and alienation. They saw them as components of both U. S. external domination and of that internally exerted in each of the region's countries by power elites over the masses.

Latin American analysts recalled that propaganda had been deemed a necessity by the founding fathers of communication science, such as Lasswell, who regarded propaganda as the "new hammer and anvil of social solidarity."⁵⁸ They were aware that World War II was the origin of mass communication theory, research, and modern practice.⁵⁹ And they had reasons to feel that the traditional paradigm was well suited to the United States and Western European postwar purposes of oversea economic, political, and cultural empire-like expansion that keeps countries such as those of Latin America in a situation of underdevelopment resembling colonial days.⁶⁰

Such preoccupations were substantiated by evidence of quasi-monopolistic control of international news, advertising, and film and television materials by the United States, as well as of related investments and policies of this country abroad.⁶¹ The analysts also expressed alarm when the United States Congress investigations revealed that, beyond the overt propaganda activities of the United States Information Agency (USIA), covert United States government activities in communication in and on Latin America had taken place not only to discredit but even to help overthrow some change-oriented and legitimately established governments of Latin America.⁶² And they noted that all such operations were instances of communication practice congenial with the undemocratic, unilinear transmission and persuasion mentality.

On the other hand, Latin Americans do not celebrate feedback as understood in the classical paradigm. They feel it expresses a privilege of sources to allow their receivers to respond to the initiatives of those controlling the media. They also point out that feedback is exclusively used to make sure that the message is adjusted to the receiver in such a manner that he will understand it and comply with the communicator's requests.^{63, 64}

Alienation: Imposing an Ideology

We Latin Americans are quite emphatic about the alienating influences of mass communication. Research has extensively documented the overwhelming influence of United States orientation, content, and financing on the mass media of the region. Several studies have uncovered the inculcation of a series of alien values and norms amounting to the promotion of a whole way of life: the capitalist ideology. This takes place through virtually all media but appears more pronounced via television, specialized magazines (including comics), transnational advertising in general, and foreign news.⁶⁵

In being worried about the consequences of such media content, the Latin Americans object also to certain nontraditional conceptualizations of communication such as those of Marshall McLuhan.⁶⁶ For instance, Antonio Pasquali,⁶⁷ a Venezuelan philosopher and researcher of communication, rejects as conservative the postulate that "the medium is the message." This objection is not meant to deny that today's ubiquitous presence of the mass media must have, per se, some influence on people. It is addressed at preventing such conformist statements from throwing a veil over the reality of the impact of noxious messages carried by the media. These viewpoints are shared by other Latin Americans, such as Diaz Bordenave.⁶⁸ "In spite of whatever Marshall McLuhan may argue, the content of social communication media is relevant for the development of persons and thus for national development." Latin Americans are not too sure that the world has become a "global village" since millions of them, to start with, have no access whatever to any mass media. And, if the magic of electronics is indeed bringing all of humanity together, they fear the "village" will be run, more than ever before in history, by the few and the mighty. On the other hand, Latin Americans are not alone in suspecting that, for all his shocking originality, McLuhan is not really too far apart from the classical conservative mentality in that—as pointed out by Finkelstein⁶⁹—he can be regarded as the foremost spokesman of the corporate establishment.

Vertical Communication

“We cannot conceive of the exercise of power by individual A over individual B without some communication from A to B.”⁷⁰ Latin America is a most clear example of the appropriateness of such statement. A sheer minority of its population exerts power over the vast majority so as to secure overall domination. To do so, the oligarchic elites’ recourse to mass communication is a tool for keeping the situation unchanged. This use of communication is often done in such an undemocratic manner that leads to calling it “vertical communication,” as Pasquali, Freire and Gerace did. And this which happens between social classes within each Latin American country also happens between all of them—a dependent society—and the United States of America, its external dominator. In both cases, the powerful subordinate the powerless with the assistance of communication.

The situation neatly fits with the linearity of the classical paradigm, which does not favour democratic communication behaviour, as the following observation suggests:

What often takes place under the label of communication is little more than a dominating monologue in the interest of the starter of the process. Feedback is not employed to provide an opportunity for genuine dialogue. The receiver of the messages is passive and subdued, as he is hardly ever given proportionate opportunities to act concurrently also as a true and free emitter; his essential role is that of listening and obeying.⁷¹

Many in Latin America agree with such statements. Gerace⁷² feels that it is urgent to conceive other communication theories more in accordance with this region and with the Third World in general. And a Paraguayan scholar puts it this way:

We must overcome our mental compulsion to perceive our own reality through foreign concepts and ideologies and learn to look at communication and adoption from a new perspective.⁷³

The Freirean Perspective: A Landmark

New perspectives emerged in the early part of the 1960s, thanks to a Brazilian Catholic teacher and philosopher of education, Paulo Freire. His view of education as a tool of liberation of the masses from oppression by the elites earned him exile from his country at the middle of the decade. Since then, writing first from Chile, and later from Geneva, he has seen his ideas spread internationally and put into experimentation even in Africa. ...

Education for Oppression

Freire⁷⁴ launched a major critique of traditional education as a tool for cultural domination of the majorities by the conservative elites. Just as Berlo had called the traditional transmission scheme “bucket” theory of communication, Freire called classical pedagogy “banking” education. “Bankers” (teachers) are those representing the “rich” in knowledge (the members of the power elites who monopolize information along with most everything else of value in society) who make “deposits” in the minds of the “poor” (ignorant), the students, who are to receive passively the “wealth” so transferred to them. The “deposits” contain the set of norms, myths, and values of the oppressors of humanity. If the oppressed learn them well, they can hope to move up in the socio-economic, political and cultural structure presided over by the oppressors. That is, they can “cash in” one day the deposits for the material goods that the bankers are willing to paternalistically grant them as a reward for conforming to their ideology and not upsetting the established order. In doing so, most of the oppressed tend to become oppressors since, although some may wish to act differently, they are “afraid of freedom.” In this manner the exploited masses themselves are used to help secure the perpetuation of the system. And as Gerace⁷⁵ pointed out: “Perhaps the worst oppression is that which grabs the soul of man, turning him into the shadow of his oppressor.”

Thus Freire⁷⁶ warns that: “No pedagogy that is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by

treating them as unfortunates and *by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors*. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.”

How is Truth Propagated?

Behind “banking education” lies—Pinto⁷⁷ argues—a theory of knowledge that defines the relationships prevailing between a subject who knows and a reality-object which is known. Such reality is understood as something static and finished. And both the subject who knows and the known object are regarded as metaphysical entities as well as fixed and distinct units. This accounts for making very difficult the subject-object relationship. It is hard for the subject to comprehend the object. When eventually he manages to comprehend it, what is born is a relationship of ownership between the former and the latter. Here comes in, adds Pinto, the notion of truth as the possession of the subject. Pinto concludes:

It is then generated between educator and learner, a totally vertical social relationship: the educator-subject, owner of absolute truth, deposits it (imposes) into the intelligence of the learner, who receives it passively (memorizes)... This verticality implies an intellectual domination of the educator over the learner, which is supported by a system of disciplinary sanctions so that the truth shall always be accepted without contestation.⁷⁸

Domestication Instead of Liberation

Such an authoritarian relationship, Freire feels, is manipulative of persons, who are treated as things or animals. Regardless of how much this may be disguised at times by apparently non-ruthless teaching devices, it constitutes an offence to human dignity and freedom. Such “domestication” is only possible because the teacher, instead of helping the student to demystify reality, contributes to the further mystification of it. Thus the student is not allowed to discover that culture is superior to nature, that man is a historical being able to constantly transform its physical

and social reality, and that the oppressed, rather than accepting such reality fatalistically, are capable of freeing themselves from it and constructing a different one. ... Freire stresses:⁷⁹

This is why, to us, education as the practice of freedom, is not the transfer or transmission of wisdom or culture, it is not the extension of technical knowledge, it is not the act of depositing reports or facts in learners, it is not the “perpetuation of the values of a given culture,” it is not “the effort of adaptation of the learner to his milieu.

In addition to submissiveness and passivity, lack of creativity is seen as one consequence of the “banking” type of education. Prevented from reasoning critically, the person is inhibited from developing his imagination; his consciousness about nature and social existence remains naive and often [perceived as] magic, as the rulers prefer it to be. This may also foster selfish individualism and competitiveness among the oppressed rather than solidarity and cooperation. Thus society remains as if narcotized to serve the ends of the minorities controlling education and communication.

The Media: Agents of Subjugation

Freire regarded mass communication media as propagators of the myths, norms and values of the oligarchic minorities and, as such, vertical and alienating communication tools in charge of helping attain the subjugation of the oppressed. And referring to the interpersonal adult education format known as agricultural extension, established in Latin America through U. S. [foreign] aid, the Brazilian scholar attacked it as the opposite of true communication since to educate is not to extend something from the “seat of wisdom” to the “seat of ignorance.”

For us, education as the practice of freedom is, above and before all, a truly agnostic situation, that in which the act of knowing does not end in the object to be known since it gets in communication with other subjects that are also knowledgeable.⁷⁹

Towards Democratic Communication

With very few exceptions, early critics of the traditional conceptualisations of communication did not reach deep enough into the roots of what they criticized: economy and politics, the power game. One of those exceptions was the late C. Wright Mills,⁸⁰ who denounced the mass media as promoters of a psychological illiteracy among the masses addressed at favouring the hegemony of the power elites. Recently, Rogers⁸¹ claimed that the linear models imply an autocratic, one-sided view of human relationships and rated the classical pattern a “passing paradigm.” And Professor Lasswell himself, in prospecting in 1972 the future of world communication as related to the development of nations, came to anticipate two contrasting paradigms. He labelled one the “oligarchic model” serving the aims of transnational power centers: “In striving to consolidate an oligarchic world public order, the instruments of communication are used to indoctrinate and distract.” Lasswell labelled the alternative a “participatory model,” under which he sees that “... mass media provide attention opportunities that generate and re-edit common maps of man’s past, present, and future and strengthen a universal and differentiated sense of identity and common interest.”⁸² To Harms and Richstad⁸³ the oligarchic model “is seen as parallel to the linear, one-way transmission communication model that has been employed in the study of mass communication and other source-controlled systems.”

To a large extent, however, it has been Latin American perspectives which uncovered the roots of the classical transmission/persuasion pro status quo paradigm: the undemocratic nature of social relationships within nations and between them. Indeed virtually all Latin American criticisms are well condensed in the expression “vertical communication”; that is, from the top down, domineering, imposing, monological and manipulatory: in short, not democratic.

So perceived, communication is not a technical question to be antiseptically dealt with in isolation from the economic, political and cultural structure

of society. It is a political matter largely determined by this structure and, in turn, contributes to the perpetuation of it. Thus, the search for a way out of such a situation is addressed in moving from vertical/undemocratic communication to horizontal/democratic communication. ...

Theoretical and Practical Advances

In diverse parts of the world, but especially in the less developed countries, and notoriously in those of Latin America, horizontal communication technologies are being experimented with. They are face-to-face communication procedures, such as Freire’s conscientization, special combinations of mass media with group techniques, or group communication formats built around modern audio-visual instruments. In Peru, for instance, mobile videotape units are being used for rural nonformal education in a way that gives peasants opportunities for being not only receivers but also emitters of messages.^{84, 85} In the same country a large effort with simple media, such as community newspapers and loudspeaker systems, is turning slum people into active and autonomous communicators.⁸⁶ And in Uruguay, audio-cassette units provided with recording facilities are making cooperative farmers share in a nationwide teleforum whose contents they determine.⁸⁷ UNESCO is sponsoring studies, bibliographies, and publications in this area of “mini-media” or “intermediate” communication technologies. International meetings directly and exclusively addressed at participatory communication have recently taken place in Yugoslavia and Ecuador.^{88, 89}

Several authors have contributed to the reformulation of the concept of communication. Few, however, concentrated on this task sufficiently to arrive at a systematic design of models of democratic communication. By 1967, Moles⁹⁰ had offered the notion of “cultural cycle” involving creator, micromedia, mass media and macromedia. In 1970 Schaeffer⁹¹ proposed the communication triangle with the mediator as central. Concurrently, Williams⁹² urged researchers to study communication as a relational phenomenon of transaction.

At the onset of the present decade, Johannesen⁹³ produced a valuable analytical summary of conceptualizations of “communication as dialogue.” In critically analysing communication as related to the mass culture, Pasquali⁹⁴ provided some basis for horizontal communication thought. Díaz Bordenave⁹⁵ perceptively evaluated the initial evolution of the concept of communication towards a democratic model, which had been highly stimulated by Freire’s thinking. Then Cloutier⁹⁶ formulated the “EMIREC” scheme, which attempted to bring together emitter and receiver. And, elaborating on Freire’s education for liberation proposal as well as capitalizing on pioneer experiences in Bolivia and Perú, Gerace⁹⁷ explored further the nature of horizontal communication, and Gutierrez⁹⁸ wrote on the notion of “total language.” Almost invariably across these and other similar works, dialogue was played up as the crucial agent of democratic communication. . . .

A more recent and methodical proposition is that of Fernando Reyes Matta,⁹⁹ who developed in considerable detail a macro-operative “model of communication with active social participation.” More than explicitly attempting to redefine communication, this Latin American analyst postulated a broad pragmatic blueprint of institutional organization to make possible horizontal communication. Although concepts such as communication rights, access, and participation appeared not to have been sufficiently defined, Reyes Matta sought to utilize them in interrelated ways. Other recent contributions to conceptualizing horizontal communication are those of Azcueta,¹⁰³ Diaz Bordenave,¹⁰⁴ Jouet,^{105,106} and Pinto.¹⁰⁷ CIESPAL¹⁰⁸ has published a preliminary report of its 1978 Quito meeting on participatory communication.

Finally, two United States researchers—L.S. Harms^{100, 101} and Jim Richstad¹⁰²—conducted pioneer systematic efforts to interrelate the notions of communication rights, resources, and needs. They arrived at an interchange model of human communication which, in spite of limitations such as its purely dyadic nature, offers democratizing insights and shows

considerable heuristic power. This model did not attempt to integrate communication rights-needs-resources with access-dialogue-participation in communication. And neither the model of Reyes Matta nor that of Harms and Richstad deals specifically with communication purposes, such as persuasion.

The Nature of Horizontal Communication

In light of the criticisms reviewed, the innovative propositions just summarized and other related considerations, the following definition is now proposed for discussion:¹⁰⁹

Communication is the process of democratic social interaction, based upon exchange of symbols, by which human beings voluntarily share experiences under conditions of free and egalitarian access, dialogue, and participation. Everyone has the right to communicate in order to satisfy communication needs by enjoying communication resources.¹¹⁰

Human beings communicate with multiple purposes. The exertion of influence on the behavior of others is not the main one.

Access is the effective exercise of the right to receive messages.

Dialogue is the effective exercise of the right to concurrently receive and emit messages.

Participation is the effective exercise of the right to emit messages.

Communication right is the natural entitlement of every human being to emit and receive messages, intermittently or concurrently.

Communication need is both a natural individual demand and a requirement of social existence to use communication resources in order to engage in the sharing of experiences through symbol-mediated interaction.

Communication resource is any energy/matter element—cognitive, affective or physical—usable to make possible the exchange of symbols among human beings.

Freedom is a relative concept. Absolute freedom is neither desirable nor viable. Each individual's freedom is limited by the freedom of the others, the restriction being the product of a social responsibility agreement in the service of common good. Each society's freedom is relative to the freedom of other societies.

Egalitarianism is a relative concept. Absolute equality is not possible. Total symmetry in the distribution of opportunities for emitting and receiving messages is unattainable. Comparable opportunities are possible inasmuch as expanding the receiving opportunities is possible and inasmuch as significantly reducing the concentration of emitting opportunities may not be impossible. Thus, a fair balance of proportions is sought; mathematical equivalence is not.

Exerting behavioural influence is a licit communication purpose on condition that it is not unilateral, authoritarian or manipulatory. That is to say, persuasion that at least potentially is mutual and which in effect respects human dignity needs not be dismissed as an aim of communication. Even in such cases, however, persuasion is but one among the many and diverse goals of communication and should not be deemed the most important.

A Few Operative Considerations

1. The free and egalitarian access-dialogue-participation process of communication is based upon the rights-needs-resources structure and is addressed to the fulfillment of multiple purposes.
2. Access is a precondition for horizontal communication since, without comparable opportunities for all persons to receive messages, there can be, to start with, no democratic social interaction.
3. Dialogue is the axis of horizontal communication for, if genuine democratic interaction is to take place, each person should have comparable opportunities for emitting and receiving messages so as to preclude monopolization of the word through monologue. Given that, under such perspective, these opposite roles are subsumed into a constant

and balanced dual performance, all participants in the communication process should be identified as "*communicators*," as Harms-Richstad correctly proposed. Thus the differentiation between the two separate options—"source" and "receiver"—becomes no longer appropriate.

The conviction that dialogue—conversation – is at the heart of true human communication is held not only by educators like Freire. The philosopher Buber¹¹¹ is a strong advocate of it. And so are psychiatrists and psychologists such as Carl Rogers¹¹² and Eric Fromm.¹¹³ Dialogue makes possible a cultural environment favorable to freedom and creativity of the type deemed most conducive to full growth of intelligence by biologist Jean Piaget.¹¹⁴

4. Participation is the culmination of horizontal communication because without comparable opportunities for all persons to emit messages the process would remain governed by the few.
5. From a perspective of practical viability, access-dialogue-participation constitutes a probabilistic sequence. This is to say that, in terms of degree of difficulty of attainment, access is at a low level, dialogue at an intermediate one, and participation at a high level. Getting more people to receive messages is deemed easier than building circumstances that would make dialogue possible and doing this latter is regarded as more feasible than effectively turning every person into a significant emitter.
6. Access is essentially a quantitative matter. Dialogue is eminently a qualitative matter. And participation is a qualitative/quantitative matter.
7. Access, dialogue and participation are the key components of the systemic process of horizontal communication. They have a relationship of interdependence. Namely, (a) the more the access, the higher the probabilities of dialogue and participation; (b) the better the dialogue, the more the usefulness of access and the greater the impact of participation; and (c) the more and better the participation, the more the probabilities

of occurrence of dialogue and access. All together, the more access, dialogue and participation there is, the more communication needs will be satisfied and communication rights will be effective, and the more and better will communication resources be used.

8. Self-management, illustrated by the outstanding Yugoslavian experience with communication enterprises which are neither private nor governmental but communitarian, is deemed the most advanced and wholistic form of participation since it allows the citizenry to decide on policy, plans and actions.¹¹⁵
9. Feedback is a positive key feature of dialogue when it operates in a balanced multidirectional way by which each and every person involved in a communication situation gives it and receives it in comparable proportions. Feedback is contrary to dialogue when it is unidirectional, for it serves dependence, not balanced interdependence.
10. The practice of horizontal communication is more viable in the case of interpersonal formats (individual and group) than in the case of impersonal (mass) formats. An obvious technical explanation for it is the intrinsic difficulty of attaining feedback in mass communication. But the main explanation is political: the fact that the means of mass communication, for the most part, are entrenched tools of the conservative and mercantilistic forces controlling the means of production nationally and internationally.

A Word of Caution and a Word of Hope

Restraint is indispensable. Horizontal communication is, conceptually, the exact opposite of vertical communication. But, realistically, the former should not be regarded necessarily as a substitute for the latter. Under given circumstances, it can be such. Under different circumstances, it can be a co-existing alternative. As Buber¹¹⁶ pointed out, dialogue is not always possible. And, it can be added, monologue is often not avoidable and sometimes it turns even necessary,

THE POPULAR AND THE MASS

Excerpt from: *Cuadernos de Comunicación*

By Jesús Martín Barbero

It is time to break from the cybernetic model of sender-message-receiver, etc. The break must be a radical one, since this model prevents us from thinking "domination," or from knowing how the dominated decipher the messages of the communications media. Such a break involves a double displacement. First, the processes and products of mass culture must be placed historically; second, they must be placed within the context of the other fields and spheres in which culture is produced today. What is vital in this historical placement is to abandon the idealism that causes us to believe that the cultural muck that surrounds us can be blamed on marketers, or that the monster we call "the system" can be faulted for everything that goes wrong—or that we consider wrong.

Martín Barbero, Jesús (1979). "Lo popular y lo masivo," *Cuadernos de Comunicación* No. 62, Mexico City. Reprinted with permission of the author

depending on varying aims and circumstances. They may be viewed, Johannesen¹¹⁷ suggests, as extremes on a continuum. Ideally, all communication should be horizontal. Practically, this is not always possible nor, perhaps, even desirable. Thus, if vertical communication has to remain on the scene, to some extent, what should not at any rate happen is that it be manipulative, deceiving, exploitative and coercive.

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